THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Department of Posts is exploring the possibility of card based payment solutions to facilitate cashless transactions. The proposal is at present at a preliminary stage and no final decision in the matter has been taken.

(c) the proposal under consideration is intended to improve the postal financial services by making it possible for the customers to transact business without carrying cash.

STD/ISD/PCO Booths in Pondicherry

3089. SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of STD/ISD/PCO facilities available at Pondicherry, Karaikol and Mahe regions in the union territory of Pondicherry; and

(b) whether Government have any proposal to give more STD/ ISD/PCO facilities and what is the number of pending applications?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) The number of STD/ISD/PCOs functioning in Pondicherry, Karaikol and Mahe regions in the union territory of Pondicherry are 680, 166 and 77 respectively.

(b) STD/ISD/PCOs will be provided as and when applications are received from eligible candidates subject to technical feasibility. No applications are pending in Pondicherry and Karaikol regions, However, 15 applications for allotment of PCOs are pending in Mahe region of union territory of Pondicherry.

Strike by postal employees in Manipur

3090. SHRI S. RAMACHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the postal services in Manipur were affected in the first week of June, 2001;

(b) whether the postal employees had gone on an indefinite strike;

(c) if so, what were their demands; and

(d) how far these have since been fulfilled?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) to (d) In protest against a "within the office" transfer order, the staff went on "cease work" on 1.6.2001. It was called off on 7.6.2001 after a compromise was reached and transfer orders were modified in the overall public interest and harmony.

Damage to Emergency Telephone Service due to rain

3091. SHRI SATISH PRADHAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that very often telephones are out of order due to damage to the cables;

(b) whether Government are aware that emergency services are affected due to this; and

(c) what action Government are going to take in this matter in rainy season to avoid such situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) Yes, Sir. The telephone service gets affected due to damage to the cables.

(b) and (c) Whenever emergency services get affected, immediate action is taken for restoration of services or service is provided through alternate route. However, following actions are being taken to avoid such situations:

(i) Paper Core Cables are being replaced by PIJF or Optical Fibre Cables in a phased manner.

(ii) Induction of WLL in the network.

(iii) Proper coordination with the civic agencies like water works, electricity department etc.

(iv) Control rooms are opened to monitor the cable faults and early rectifications.